

**California Department of Parks and Recreation
Natural Resources Division**

Monitoring Santa Cruz Cypress at Wilder Ranch State Park

by
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Introduction

The Santa Cruz cypress (*Cupressus abramsiana* C. Wolf) is a member of the cypress family (Cupressaceae) that only occurs within a limited range in the Santa Cruz Mountains of Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties. It occurs in patches of coastal chaparral and mixed evergreen forests, including knobcone pine (*Pinus attenuata*), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), and redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) forests. Because of its rarity, both the California Department of Fish and Game (State) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Federal) recognize this species as endangered. There are only five known populations of the taxon with a total of approximately 5,100 individuals occupying about 142 hectares (356 acres) (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 1998). The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service prepared a Recovery Plan for the species in 1998. No federal critical habitat has been designated.

California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) owns lands where two of the five Santa Cruz cypress populations occur. Big Basin Redwoods State Park contains the Eagle Rock population and Wilder Ranch State Park has the Majors Creek population. The entire Majors Creek Santa Cruz cypress population consists of over 1,000 plants occupying approximately 55 acres in two separate stands. Approximately 77 percent (42.5 acres) of the population occurs within the Gray Whale addition to Wilder Ranch State Park (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 1998). The rest of the population is on private property. The natural fire regime on the Majors Creek site has been suppressed due to the proximity of a residential community. Since the Santa Cruz cypress is a closed-cone cypress that usually releases seed after a fire or mechanical disturbance, there is some concern over seedling recruitment of the taxon.

Background Information

Monitoring of the Santa Cruz cypress was listed as a high priority for the Santa Cruz District in their Inventory, Monitoring, and Assessment Plan for Wilder Ranch State Park. During preliminary stages of background research by the Natural Resources Division's Inventory Monitoring and Assessment Program (IMAP) support team, communications with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service revealed that they planned to hire a contractor to develop a monitoring plan for the taxon throughout its range. To avoid duplicating efforts, IMAP deferred the monitoring of the Santa Cruz cypress to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service contractor.

In October 2000, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service solicited for proposals to assess the health and status of all stands of Santa Cruz cypress. Dr. Dean Taylor's proposal was chosen and states he intends to inventory the stands, determine their geographic extent; document baseline conditions of stand health; and develop monitoring plans and management recommendations. (See Appendix A). U.S. Fish & Wildlife will update the cooperators, including California Department of Parks and Recreation, on the contractor's progress (Connie Rutherford, pers. com. 10/30/01).

Observations

Monitoring for small mammals and GPS of trails were done in the area of the Santa Cruz cypress in 2001 by the IMAP support team. IMAP personnel observed illegal trails cut through the lower Majors Creek Santa Cruz cypress stand. Adjacent neighbors encountered were not friendly towards State Parks.

Recommendations

IMAP recommends the District monitor the progress of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service contract and arrange an onsite meeting with Dr. Dean Taylor. If possible, the District may assist him with monitoring of the Major Creek Santa Cruz cypress stands. The District would have intimate knowledge of Dr. Taylor's methods and of the Majors Creek stands. It would also be prudent to request from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, a copy of Dr. Dean Taylor's final report and copies of raw data for the Majors Creek (Wilder Ranch State Park) and Big Basin State Park stands.

Literature Cited

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. 1998. Recovery plan for the Santa Cruz cypress (*Cupressus abramsiana*). U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Portland, Oregon. 51 pages plus appendices.

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Appendix A

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Request for Proposal and Bid, 10/4/00
and
Dr. Dean Taylor's proposal and bid, 11/2/00

